Dalilah Plumb

Cultural Anthropology

**Introduction**

Anthropology should be thought of as a very important science and study. Without anthropology, we would be unable to understand and appreciate the differences between the many cultures of the world. Ethnographies are an important component of anthropology allowing us to look at cultures and attempt to understand customs, actions, and the people. This paper will offer an in depth ethnography focusing on the interactions that take place at a local festival. I will specifically address the people, place and behaviors as well as how all these factors intermix with one another. To address these factors I will explain my methodology, the data and analysis and ethnology.

**Methodology**

When selecting a place and subgroup to study and process, I chose the annual River Festival that takes place in Hoquiam, Washington. I chose this particular event because although Hoquiam has many events throughout the year such as Logger’s Play day, football games, and Shorebird Festival, the River Festival is the only festival that is not put on only by the city but where several local businesses, churches, and family work together to provide a day of fun for the entire community.

In order to conduct my study, I attended the festival, arriving early to watch the set up process. Throughout the day I walked around, sitting at various different locations and writing my observations in a notebook that I had brought along with me. By doing so I limited my interactions with the people who were participating in the festival and therefore limited any change in behavior that people may exhibit when they know people are observing them.

My goals in conducting this study were to learn about the interactions that people have with one another at the River festival. I wanted to specifically look at the family and community structures and interactions that were represented there since it is a family and community based event. However, I needed to be very cautious in my study. If I was not cautious, it would be very easy for me to interpret a very biased view based off of my own personal experiences with family and community.

**Data Presentation and Analysis**

8:00 am

At this time, the festival had not actually started yet. Volunteers were quickly setting up for the festivities to begin at 10:00am. In order to set up, they had to work with police, fire department and the PUD to block off roads, redirect traffic and set up generators to power the activities. This is where I saw much of the community involvement in action. There were volunteers from local churches as well as from the high school who were working together to set up the carnival style booths.

In order to set the booths up I saw two age groups that are often in conflict with one another working diligently together in order to get everything ready on time. There were teenagers who were working alongside with middle-aged adults, which honestly was on odd sight to see with these two generations. It seems that middle-aged adults are often seen as ‘the enemy’ by teenagers since this age group of adults is the one that primarily cares for teenagers and enforces rules. Teachers, parents, police officers, etc are ones who make and enforce rules that teenagers often disagree with or see as controlling. This conflict can be seen in the immediate family between parents and teens as well as in the community between other powerful adults and teens.

Another example of groups that were working together that can often be found in conflict with one another is that of churches working with city officials. In many American communities, it seems that people are increasingly pushing for the ‘separation of church and state’. However, for the festival there are many individuals that come from churches to volunteer their time to the city and work together to set this festival up for the community. This displays the family connection that seems to result from everyone working together to set up the festival.

12:00 pm

This second period of observation occurred two hours after the festival had started. Although there was continued interaction between the groups mentioned earlier, the focus had been completely changed and was less of a group activity. Now there were teenagers and volunteers working at each of the carnival booths as well as a prize booth, firemen were working a game involving fire hoses, and police were patrolling the area as well as showing off their new squad cars functions (including a very loud siren). It is here that I realized a shift in the family and community interaction. The workers had become less involved with one another, focusing only on the task at hand while small family units had arrived and focused on each other.

The interaction between the families and the community became a bit more distanced. However, the connection between them all was still there as was evidenced by an incident that occurred; a young girl had strayed away from her parents without them noticing. When the girl realized she was separated from them she began to cry which brought the attention of a young couple. This couple walked the girl back to her parents recognizing them from earlier in the day. Although these people were strangers to each other, the community had a sense of family bond anyway.

Honestly this was probably the most difficult period of observation for the simple reason that there were so many different things all going on at once. At one end of the festival were venders which were set up by local families and individuals to sell either food or homemade products such as jewelry, art, carvings, etc; while the other end of the festival was bustling with young children and parents participating in carnival games and blow up obstacle courses. Then, sitting right in the middle of the festival was the center stage which was being hosted and run by a local radio station. Here they offered live entertainment and several contests for people such as a hula hoop contest, spelling bees, and a jump roping contest.

Again the community relationship was displayed. Parents would sit on the bleachers chatting with one another while watching their children participate in activities and games. The children were also interacting with one another while participating. It was very interesting to watch the small unit families which were clearly interacting with each other as well as watch the community interact as a large unit family. All were taking care of one another and ensuring the happiness of others. I even watched a woman buy a stranger an ice cream cone!

4:00 pm

At this point the festival was winding down to a close. However, I did notice a very interesting effect on the age groups that were still present. Many of the families with children had already left, especially those with young children, as had most of the middle-aged adults. The predominant age group that remained as the festival came to a close was the teenagers. I attribute this to the fact that while most adults have other responsibilities, this festival takes place during the summer when many teens are out of school and spend their summer days searching for socialization and activities to entertain themselves.

It was also apparent that many of the remaining volunteers that were planning on taking down the booths, blow up toys, stage and bleachers were young adults and teenagers; most of the adult volunteers had left for the day. This I attribute to family responsibility that young adults may not have since they likely live alone or without children. As for the teens, not many of them are expected to cook dinner, clean the house and take of children like adults are.

This shift in the age groups present lead to yet another shift in the interactions presented. During the set up time and throughout the day, the majority of the workers had been very efficient and businesslike. However, now that the day was coming to a close and the age groups had shifted once again; the atmosphere had became little bit more light hearted. People were playful (despite being very tired from working all day) and celebratory. They engaged in games and joking as they were picking things up and tearing down the stands and game booths. Even with the shifts in age and atmosphere, the family feeling was still present, right up to the end of the festival.

**Ethnology**

**Conclusion**

After conducting this study, I feel that I was able to answer my main question; family structure was displayed openly at the River Festival, not just between immediate families, but within the community as a whole. Not only that, but it was displayed across age groups as well as throughout the duration of the festival. The conclusion that I drew from my several hours of observation was that for a special event such as this the community was made up of one unit and one ‘family’ as opposed to other events that presented several segregated families with much less community interaction and cooperation. Due to the limited length of this paper, there is much more information that could have been included. Further research could be done into the interactions between venders and individuals as well as the interaction between artifacts and individuals.